

Mr. Sharon has said that he favors a long-term interim agreement with the Palestinians since a comprehensive agreement is not now possible because the Palestinians have shown they are not ready to conclude such an agreement.

He has stated that he accepts a demilitarized Palestinian state, is committed to improving the daily lives of the Palestinians, and has reportedly indicated that he does not plan to build new West Bank settlements.

Whatever happens, there can be little doubt that it will have a profound impact on United States strategic interests in the Middle East. And because of that, the United States must remain an interested party in the region.

I believe that it is critical that both parties need to make every effort to end the current cycle of provocation and reaction, with a special responsibility that is incumbent upon the Palestinian Authority to seek an end to the riots, the terror, the bombings, and the shootings. There must be a "time out" on violence before the situation degenerates further into war.

We can all remember the images, from last fall, of the Palestinian child hiding behind his father, caught in the cross-fire, shot to death, and then the images, a few days later, the pictures of the Israeli soldier who was beaten while in custody and thrown out of a second floor window of the police station, to be beaten to death by the mob below.

It is easy to understand how passions can run high, and frustration and fear can drive violence.

But it is also easy to see how these feelings—even these feelings, that are based in legitimate aspiration—can get out of control and lead to ever deeper, and never-ending, cycles of violence.

The Palestinian leadership must make every effort to end this cycle, to quell the attitude of hate that has been fostered among the Palestinian people, and to act to curb the violence, and to convince Israel that they are indeed serious and sincere about pursuing peace.

But until there is evidence that the violence is ending, the United States cannot be productively engaged between the two parties.

If both Israel and the Palestinians can make progress in curbing or ending the violence, the United States can play an important role in helping to shape intermediate confidence-building measures between Israel and the Palestinians. The current environment makes a comprehensive agreement impossible, but proximity gives the Israelis and the Palestinians no choice but to learn to live together. The alternative is clearly war.

And the United States must continue to work together with Israel to strengthen the bilateral relationship, to ensure that Israel has the tools it needs to defend itself, and to enhance security in the region.

There are those who now believe that the Palestinians don't want peace;

that, in fact, they want to continue the violence, and force Israel into the sea; to take back Jaffa; to take back Haifa.

There is a segment of the population that believes this is true. But I say, how realistic is this? Can there be any doubt that Israel has the ability to defend itself, and will? Or that should there be an effort to attack Israel, to end this democracy, that the United States would be fully involved? There is no doubt of that.

So the ball is now in the Palestinian court, to show that Palestinians are interested in ending violence and bloodshed. Israel, under Barak, has shown how far it will go to search for peace, much further than I ever thought possible. The concessions offered at Camp David, and after, are testament, I believe, to Israel's desire and commitment for peace. But to seek to force peace in light of hostility and hatred on the streets is neither realistic nor sustainable.

The Sharon election, I believe, can be seen as a referendum on Arafat's actions and policies, and the Palestinian violence, and it must be taken seriously by the Palestinians if the peace process is to ever get back on track.

Just last summer, the 7-year-old peace process seemed on the verge of success, but the chairman walked away from the deal at the last moment.

I hope that someday soon Chairman Arafat will realize the profound disservice that he has done his people, and the people of the world, that he will realize that the framework for peace was on the table, that he will realize that continued violence is not the way to achieve the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, and that continued violence will not gain him or his people additional concessions at the negotiating table.

And I believe that if and when he does realize this, when he takes action to bring the current violence to an end, he will find that Israel remains a partner in the search for peace in the Middle East, with the United States as a facilitator.

Until then, however, the United States must be clear that we continue to stand with Israel, an historic ally and partner in the search for security and peace in the Middle East.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. INHOFE). The Senator from Arkansas.

AGRICULTURE DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I rise today to bring attention to an issue Washington, and the American public, too often take for granted—something that is near and dear to my heart, and a part of my heritage. I am talking about American agriculture. This country needs a wake-up call. Americans believe that their bacon, lettuce, and tomatoes are raised somewhere in the back of the local grocery store. As the daughter of a seventh generation

Arkansas farm family, I know where our food supply is produced. It is grown in rural communities by families working from dusk until dawn to make ends meet. Unfortunately, too many in Washington continue to pay lip-service to our Nation's agricultural industry without actually providing them the tools and assistance they need to sustain their way of life.

I recognize the hurt that is evident in our agricultural communities. I know that commodity prices are at record lows and input costs, including fertilizer, energy, and fuel, are at record highs. No corporation in the world could make it today receiving the same prices it received during the Great Depression, yet, we are asking our farmers to do just that.

I am here to enlighten this body on the needs of our agricultural community. And it is my intention to come to the Senate floor often this year to highlight various issues affecting our Nation's farmers and ranchers.

In the interest of fairness, I will give credit where credit is due. In recent years, Congress has recognized that farmers are suffering, and we have delivered emergency assistance to our struggling agricultural community. Arkansas' farmers could not have survived without this help. Nearly 40 percent of net farm income came from direct Government payments during the 2000 crop year. The trouble with this type of ad hoc approach is that farmers and creditors across this country never really know how or when the Government is going to step in and help them.

Many of my farmers are scared to death that the assistance that has been available in the past will be absent this year because the tax cut and other spending programs have a higher priority.

I will highlight my frustration with our Nation's farm policy in the near future, but today I want to bring the Senate's attention to a matter that should have been handled long ago, yet still remains unaddressed. Our farmers need the disaster assistance that Congress provided last Fall. President Clinton signed the FY 2001 Agriculture Appropriations Act on October 28, 2000. Included in this legislation was an estimated \$1.6 billion in disaster payments for 2000 crop losses due to weather-related damages. These payments are yet to arrive in the farmer's mailbox. My phone lines are lit up with calls from farmers and bankers asking me when these payments are going to arrive. In the South, our growing season begins earlier than many parts of the country, and our farmers could head to the field right now to begin work on the 2001 crop, if they just had their operating loan. The trouble is, many of them are unable to cash flow a loan for 2001 because they still await USDA assistance to pay off the banker for last year's disaster.

I reference the South's growing season because many of our farm State Senators are from the Midwest, and

they may not be hearing the same desperation that I am hearing. Their farmers are in no better shape, but they are not yet trying to put the 2001 crop in the ground. Arkansas farmers have been wringing their hands all winter trying to determine if it is worth it to try one more year. They are literally on the brink of bankruptcy and are weighing whether it is worth exposing themselves to more potential financial loss. These are not bad businessmen. They have survived the agricultural turmoil of the 1980s because they practice efficient production techniques and are sound managers. They have simply been dealt an unbelievably difficult hand and are trying to figure out how they can stay in the game. Some have already lost the battle. I have heard of more respected Arkansas farmers closing their shop doors and selling the family farm than ever before. Farm auction notifications fill the backs of agricultural publications.

Established, long time farmers are crying for help. A typical example, a farmer from Almyra, Arkansas recently wrote to me asking for help. He has been farming rice and soybeans in southeast Arkansas for almost 30 years. Like many others, he wanted Congress to know that government assistance is vitally needed. He and other farmers would prefer to get their income from the marketplace, but most of all, he just wants to stay in business.

The repercussions of losing people like this good farmer will have a drastic effect on our rural communities. To ignore agriculture's plight is to ignore rural America. Without farmers, the lifeblood of small towns like Almyra, Arkansas will be lost, and I fear never regained.

Around 800 to 1,100 farmers apply for Chapter 12 bankruptcy each year. The average age of the American farmer is getting older every year because young men and women simply do not see a future in agriculture production. I am reminded of a joke that my father used to tell me about the farmer who won the lottery. When a reporter asked him what he was going to do with all that money, he replied "Farm 'til it's gone!" Unfortunately, that joke is not too far from the truth these days.

We have a responsibility to provide a better agricultural policy for our nation's producers. As I stated earlier, I will address my specific frustrations with the current farm bill at a later date. Today, I am pleading that the disaster assistance we passed last Fall be delivered to the farmers as soon as possible.

I have written and urged President Bush to expedite this situation. I stressed the importance of quick action on this issue to Secretary Veneman in both private meetings and during her confirmation hearing. I contacted the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) urging them to act promptly on the rules that must be finalized to begin the payment process. For all the farmers listening out there, don't hold

your local FSA offices accountable. Their hands are tied just like yours. They await the rules and procedures for disaster assistance distribution just like you do. The responsibility lies right here in Washington, DC. Specifically, OMB, is responsible for finalizing the rules. I'm sure they are working hard to get the ball rolling, but we need action today. Not tomorrow, not next week, but today!

I call upon the Administration to deliver the disaster assistance to the farmers. Congress did its part last fall. It is now imperative that the Administration take care of things on their end. Unfortunately, this situation is nothing new. The last Administration was less than quick about implementing disaster programs as well. But that is no excuse, farmers need the help now. Dotting the "i's" and crossing the "t's" in the required paper work should not take months to accomplish.

For countless farmers across the nation, I call on the President to please expedite this matter.

I look forward to many further discussions on the Senate floor about the plight of the American farmer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for 10 minutes as in morning business, notwithstanding the previous agreement. I thank the chairman of the Budget Committee for his courtesy.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, with this agreement, what is the time arrangement after he finishes?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico was to be recognized at 10:30. He was to be recognized for 10 minutes. Under a unanimous consent request, Senator FEINSTEIN took an additional 5 minutes. If the Senator from New Mexico objects to it, then he will be recognized at 10:30. If he doesn't, the Senator from Wisconsin will be recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. DOMENICI. I had only 10 minutes in any event, did I not?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has 15 minutes.

Mr. DOMENICI. I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to object at this point, and I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for 15 minutes when my time comes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished chairman of the Budget Committee.

WEST AFRICA'S CRISIS

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I rise today to draw my colleagues attention to the continuing crisis in West Africa, where a deeply disturbing trend has emerged in strong-man politics. In the

model emerging in that region, violent regimes hold entire civilian populations hostage in order to win concessions, and even the guise of legitimacy, from the international community.

At the heart of this trend, is Liberian President Charles Taylor. While the Liberian Embassy here and the man himself are currently trying to persuade the world of their good intentions, no one who has followed Africa in recent years should be deceived. Taylor has absolutely no credibility. All reliable reports continue to indicate that he is manipulating the situation in West Africa for personal gain, at the expense of his own Liberian people, the people of Sierra Leone, and now the people of Guinea.

Some of the responsibility for the terrible abuses committed in the region must fall upon his shoulders. I believe that Liberian President Charles Taylor is a war criminal.

Having secured the presidency essentially by convincing the exhausted Liberian people that there would be no peace unless he was elected, he proceeded to provide support for the Revolutionary United Front, Sierra Leone's rebel force perhaps best known for hacking off the limbs of civilian men, women, and children to demonstrate their might, although their large-scale recruitment of child soldiers—a page borrowed from Taylor's book—is also notorious. By funneling diamonds that the rebels mined in Sierra Leone out through Liberia, and providing weapons in exchange, Taylor has profited from terrible bloodshed. And after the capture of RUF leader Foday Sankoh last year, many RUF statements suggested that Taylor was directly in control of the force. The U.N. has found "overwhelming evidence that Liberia has been actively supporting the RUF at all levels."

An international sanctions regime has been proposed, but regrettably postponed, at the United Nations. Sanctions are the correct course. And while many fear the impact on the long-suffering Liberian people, the unfortunate truth is that they are living in a state of total economic collapse even without the sanctions, largely because their head of state has no interest in the well being of his citizens.

Mr. President, I raise these issues today because I was in Sierra Leone just a few days ago. Previously, I had traveled in Nigeria, the regional giant in transition. Although I am more convinced than ever before, in the wake of my trip, that Nigeria's leadership must take bold steps to confront that country's difficult resource distribution issues and to hold those guilty of grand corruption accountable for their actions, I came away from my visit to Nigeria more optimistic than I had been when I arrived. From Port Harcourt to Kano, in Lagos and in Abuja, I met with dedicated, talented individuals in civil society and in government, who are absolutely committed to making the most of their historic opportunity